



NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Gives Guidance on Ebola

BISMARCK, N.D. – There are no reported cases of Ebola in North Dakota and the risk of introduction of the virus into North Dakota or the United States is considered to be low. However, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is putting plans in place to educate the public and is preparing to respond in the unlikely event that Ebola is discovered here.

The NDDoH is partnering with other agencies, including the North Dakota University System (NDUS) and local public health units, and health care professionals across the state to prepare for and respond if Ebola appears here. The goal of the outreach efforts is to limit the likelihood that Ebola will enter the state, and to react quickly in the event a case of Ebola is diagnosed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a warning to avoid unnecessary travel to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia in western Africa. The department urges anyone who must travel to or from these countries to avoid exposure to people who exhibit signs of illness, and to report any illnesses that occur within 21 days of returning to North Dakota. The NDDoH has also notified health professionals across the state to consider the possibility of Ebola virus when diagnosing illnesses in recent travelers to that region.

“We understand the public’s concern with regard to Ebola, which is a very serious illness” said Kirby Kruger, Director of Disease Control at the NDDoH. “There is no cure for Ebola and no vaccine to date. Because the world has grown smaller with the convenience of airline travel, we need to be absolutely vigilant in trying to prevent the disease from entering into and/or spreading within North Dakota and the rest of the United States.”

Ebola is spread from human to human only through direct contact with bodily fluids, such as blood or sweat. The virus is not transmitted through the air. A person has to develop a fever before they are infectious. According to the CDC, infection control procedures that are normally used by hospitals are sufficient to prevent transmission of the virus.

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Once a patient is infected, it can take up to three weeks to develop a fever, and by then the patient may not associate their fever with exposure to Ebola. Once a fever develops, the patient is infectious, but may not limit their contact with others. Another challenge is that because many illnesses start with a fever, health care professionals may not suspect Ebola, especially if they are unaware of a history of travel to the affected regions. The primary method of preventing the spread of the disease is through isolation.

Because of the number of people, including professionals and students, who may travel to and from western Africa, officials are focusing on colleges and universities in North Dakota as places that could be vulnerable to accidental transmission of the virus. The NDDoH is working with the NDUS to educate the university community regarding Ebola. With the start of the academic year only weeks away, this presents a good opportunity to address Ebola with North Dakota colleges.

Anyone who has traveled to Guinea, Sierra Leone, or Liberia should remain vigilant after returning to the U.S. If they experience any illness at all within 21 days of travel, they are urged to limit their contact with others and seek professional medical help immediately. The patient should be sure to tell his or her provider about recent travel. Medical professionals have been reminded that Ebola is a reportable disease and they must contact the NDDoH immediately if they suspect a case of Ebola in a patient. They have also been reminded of the testing that must be done, and the isolation and infection control measures that must be taken.

The NDDoH will be monitoring the CDC's information regarding Ebola and will keep the general public informed of the status of the virus in the state.

For more information, access the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/> or contact Kirby Kruger, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701-328-2372.

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